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ABSTRACT

Big school districts promised to hold down costs by centralizing functions under one roof and delivering a greater selection of academic offerings and activities, thus improving education. But they have not delivered. Up to a certain size, consolidation can save costs, but above that size, districts experience "diseconomies of scale," including misallocation of funds toward bureaucracy rather than instruction. On average, large districts' standardized test scores fall in the lower end of their expected ranges, while smaller districts' scores fall in the upper end of their ranges. Large schools are concentrated in large districts, and big schools experience the same problems as big districts. Parents are not happy with big districts--their complaints over test scores, curriculum, taxes, or anything else always come back to the issue of control. In a big district, the bureaucracy makes the important decisions, and parents feel alienated. Some districts have tried to create sub-schools that share a common school building or to create sub-districts or local councils, but they fail to address the issue of control. If administrators don't deal with the problem, frustrated citizens will take their complaints to the state, which will attempt to force quality. Limiting the size of districts and schools and creating smaller districts will improve academics and efficiency and encourage public participation by bringing issues back to the local level. This will spur innovation, flexibility, and commitment by parents and teachers. (TD)

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Big Trouble: Solving Education Problems Means Rethinking Super-Size Schools and Districts

By David Cox

January 2002

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Executive Summary

"Big Trouble: Solving Education Problems Means Rethinking Super-Size Schools and Districts"

By David N. Cox

Bigger may be better when it comes to "super-sized" fast food meals, but it's far from proven that big schools and big school districts are better when it comes to quality education that's cost effective. You wouldn't know that, though, from Utah schools. Of the approximately 14,800 school districts in the United States, Utah's Jordan, Granite, Davis, and Alpine districts are among the 100 largest. Our two largest districts, Jordan and Granite, have more than 70,000 students each. As a basis of comparison, Ogden City had about 77,000 residents in 2000.

Parents are not happy with big districts and big schools, although they rarely put their complaints in those terms. However, parents' complaints over test scores, curriculum, taxes, or anything else always come back to the issue of control. Who is making the decisions about their children's education? In a big district, district employees, handling a student population akin to a good-sized city, make most of the important decisions. In such a situation, parents are hopelessly cut off from any feeling of control.

Super-size districts began forming in the early part of the twentieth century. In 1900 there were more than 150,000 school districts in the United States; today, as noted above, there are fewer than 15,000. At the same time, student populations in large districts have grown due to migration and overall population growth. Big districts promised to deliver "economies of scale," the ability to hold down costs by centralizing functions under one roof. They also promised to deliver a greater selection of academic offerings and activities, and better quality education.

Big districts have failed to deliver. Up to a certain size districts can save costs by consolidating, but districts above that size begin to experience "diseconomies of scale," including misallocation of funds toward bureaucracy rather than instruction. While they deliver a wide range of academic courses and extracurricular activities, large districts don't seem to measure up when it comes to teaching basic skills. When their standardized test scores are examined in light of the socioeconomic situation of the students, on average large districts' test scores fall in the lower end of their expected ranges, while on average smaller districts' test scores fall in the upper end of their ranges.

Big districts seem to lead to big schools: large schools are concentrated in large districts, and of the 50 states Utah is sixth in average district size and also sixth in average size of school. Big schools are victim to many of the same problems as big districts.

Some districts and schools have tried to counter this super-size trend by creating sub-schools that share a common school building, or creating sub-districts or local councils. These efforts aim in the right direction, but they miss their marks because they fail to address the issue of

control. They typically give nominal power to people at the local level, but retain the power to make final decisions at the central level.

School administrators cannot afford to ignore the problem of super-sized schools and districts, not only because providing quality education is their chief responsibility, but because if they don't deal with the problem, the public will find ways to deal with it for them. Bigness alienates citizens toward our educational institutions, depleting local support. Frustrated citizens will then take their complaints to the state, resulting in increased state controls and the diversion of funding from basic instruction into accountability schemes that attempt to force quality.

Setting a limit on the size for both districts and schools, and creating an orderly way to set up new, smaller districts, will achieve better academics and a more efficient use of tax dollars over the long term. It will encourage more participation by both students and citizens. Smaller districts and schools bring the problems and opportunities back to the local level. This freedom will spur innovation, flexibility, and commitment by both parents and teachers. Only then will true accountability, educational quality, and efficiency be within our reach.

Big Trouble: Solving Education Problems Means Rethinking Super-Size Schools and Districts

By David N. Cox

We Utahns love to have everything from our fast-food meals to our trucks "super-sized"; you might even say our families are "super-sized"! In many cases bigger is better, but not always. When it comes to schools and school districts, we as a nation have typically consolidated districts to make them larger under the assumption that bigger was better, specifically, more cost-effective and providing better academics. Yet several decades of super-size districts have called into question the notion that bigger districts deliver cost-effective, high-quality services. Some districts might be too big, and might do better to *de*-consolidate.

More than half of Utah's students reside in only four of our forty districts. Our two largest districts, Jordan and Granite, have over 70,000 students each. Of the approximately 14,800 school districts in the United States, Utah's Jordan, Granite, Davis, and Alpine districts are among the 100 largest.

Elsewhere in the nation, many parents in giant school districts are not happy with their schools. Those who can afford to demonstrate their displeasure often "vote with their feet" and move their children into private schools. Robert W. Jewell found a strong correlation between non-Catholic private school enrollment and large district and school size. He states, "The larger the districts and schools, the greater the non-Catholic private school enrollments among the states."[1] Utah seems at present to be bucking the trend. We have the lowest percentage of private school enrollment in the United States. Perhaps our larger family size has made that option too expensive, but a growing segment of the electorate is demanding vouchers and tuition tax-credits. If passed, these options would make it financially possible for many more parents to "opt-out."

Support for school choice is becoming almost a litmus test for the majority Republican Party here in Utah. Even a former Democratic State Party Chair is involved in the push. Most school administrators remain solidly opposed to any school choice initiative, but while they may win temporary legislative battles, if they are going to justify their stance over the long term, they need to address why parents are frustrated and dissatisfied with public education. I suggest that the desire for private schools is growing, at least in part, because our schools and districts have become too big.

Big Roots of Dissent

What root problem of public education has disaffected so many parents in the last twenty years that they want to place their children in private or charter schools? A few potential culprits have presented themselves in recent years.

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[1] Robert W. Jewell, "School and School District Size Relationships, Costs, Results, Minorities, and Private School Enrollments," *Education and Urban Society* (1989) 140-153.

Test scores. Test results can indicate that a problem exists, but they are not the problem itself. Some people suggest that declining test scores show that students today are not learning as well as they used to; others argue that the test results are being misinterpreted. Still others say that the tests themselves are not valid indicators of education progress. In any case, the test results themselves are not driving the school choice movement.

Curriculum. Although Utah has not yet experienced "math wars" and "reading wars" like California and other states, war may be brewing here now that "whole math" and the latest version of "whole language/balanced literacy" have been adopted by the Utah State Office of Education. These approaches represent the "constructivist" teaching philosophy that avoids "direct instruction," discipline-oriented learning techniques like grammar rules, times tables, phonics, and so on, in favor of child-guided, holistic learning. Constructivist approaches have had limited success, so promoters of constructivist teaching have clashed with parents and teachers who support direct instruction. The latter groups, however, find it increasingly difficult to influence district and state curriculum committees. Promoters of constructivist teaching silence or isolate opponents in subtle ways: "You don't want to be one of those 'drill and kill' teachers, do you?"; "Don't let those old (experienced) teachers influence you as you begin teaching"; or, "You're the only one who has voiced this concern." This intimidation alienates many would-be friends of education.

Even so, there have always been disagreements about curriculum, but people did not consider leaving public education over it. Consider the debates over the teaching of evolution versus biblical creation of the early twentieth century, or whether and how much sex education children should receive at school. Curriculum will and should always be an issue under debate: every generation needs to learn, focus, and decide what information is important and how and to what degree it should be taught. Dissatisfaction with curriculum, like test scores, is a symptom of the problem, but it has not caused the call to get rid of public education.

Taxes. While Americans have protested taxes since before our nation was formed, in most every state and national poll for the last twenty years Americans have expressed support for increasing taxes *if* it would improve schools.[2] This sentiment opens the debates about where and how these funds should be spent, and whether more money improves schools at all. But the fact remains that many parents and citizens would be happy to pay much more for education if the system responded to their desires and concerns.

I could list many other concerns about education in addition to these three, but all of them would be symptoms of the problem, not the problem itself. In truth, parents and taxpayers constantly find problems with education and just as constantly propose solutions, but never seem to be able to put their solutions into action, at least not in the way they had in mind. The problem is not that problems exist, but that we can't do anything to fix them. That, then, is the real root cause of dissatisfaction with public education: **Control.**

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[2] For example, BYU's 1999 Poll of The Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools in Utah, by the Department of Educational Leadership, shows a steady increase from 1994's 57 percent support to pay more taxes to help raise the standard of education in Utah, to 59 percent in 1997, 62 percent in 1998, and 64 percent in 1999. Gallup polls of the 1990s have also confirmed this trend nationwide.

Control, or lack of it, drives the anger and frustration of the public toward public education. Who controls the quality, financing, and curriculum of our schools? While many citizens intuitively feel these decisions are best made by the parents and teachers of students in the local neighborhood, under our current system, for various reasons, the power to make those decisions rests in the hands of school boards and administrators who oversee increasingly large and bureaucratic districts.

How Did We Get So Big?

In 1900 there were more than 150,000 school districts in the United States. Single-school school districts were common; some districts were even so small they employed only one teacher! But in the early 20th century, the assembly-line factory model revolutionized industry because it created "economies of scale," efficiencies in production created by centralizing operations in one big plant rather than many small plants, and dividing previously complicated tasks into simple, repetitive ones that could be performed more quickly. Very soon other fields were eager to take advantage of economies of scale, and school districts were no exception. In 1915 Utah's 380 districts were consolidated into 39 districts; today, despite huge population growth, we have just 40 districts.[3]

After World War II many people migrated from rural agricultural communities to cities, leaving fewer students and taxpayers for rural schools, so there was a strong push to consolidate school districts in rural areas. There were still about 128,000 districts in America in 1930, but by the end of the 1960s there were only 36,000.[4] Today there are fewer than 15,000 school districts nationwide.[5] Our cities grew even as districts consolidated, , and with them their school districts, resulting in fewer but much bigger districts. America today has 24 districts with more than 100,000 students.[6]

When this process began, it was easy for administrators to convince parents to allow consolidation of schools and districts because of the advantages of economies of scale, meaning lower taxes, and increased academic opportunities like clubs, sports, and specialized academic courses. These very benefits had attracted many parents to cities. At the time *dis*economies of scale—the result of being too big—weren't even considered; our cities and districts weren't as big then as they are today. In his 1959 report "The American High School Today," J.B. Conant called for administrators to increase high school size to 400 students.[7] Florence Webb cites a telling quote from a 1971 Educational Research Service study of 26 reports completed between 1939 and 1969. It stated that the most common recommendation for district size was 10,000, and that, "The decrease in the total number of school districts has been 85.9 percent ... The job is, however, far from completed." indicating the need to further consolidate.[8] Since then we have

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3 Minutes of Education Interim Committee, Utah Legislature, September 16, 1987.

4 C. Pipho, "Rural Education," *Phi Delta Kappan* (1987) 6-7. See also Kent McGuire, "School Size, The Continuing Controversy," *Education and Urban Society* (1989) 173.

5 Mike Antonucci, "Mission Creep: How Large School Districts Lose Sight of the Objective—Student Learning" *Alexis de Tocqueville Institution Brief* #176 (November 17, 1999).

6 *Ibid.*

7 J. B. Conant, "The American High School Today," *Carnegie Series in American Education* (1959).

8 Florence R. Webb, "A District of a Certain Size," *Education and Urban Society* (1989) 127-128.

increased both school and district size far beyond the limits proponents of larger size suggested at that time. Today we have high schools with more than 5,000 students and districts with up to *1 million* students.

Big Disappointments

These large districts have not brought the envisioned financial savings. Webb & Ohm (1984) found smaller districts "more efficient than larger ones in both dollars per student and numbers of administrators per student."[9] Mike Antonucci found that there are "penalties of scale": instead of making up a larger percentage of the budget as school district size increases, the percentage spent on teachers, books, and teaching materials *decreases*. He writes, "Paradoxically, the larger a school district gets, the more resources it devotes to secondary or even non-essential activities."[10] In a 1989 study, K. McGuire found, "As specialization in staff grows, program offerings expand, and administrative personnel increase, problems of coordination and control also increase. And in large systems, time and energy are more likely to be shifted away from core service activities."[11] Antonucci also writes, "And let's not forget the labor implications. Which district is more likely to have difficult contract negotiations or work stoppages? The district with 15 bus drivers, or the one with 677 bus drivers?"

1999 Utah administrative costs per student (cps) show little difference between large districts and small unless one gets below 1,000 students. Below 1,000 students the administrative costs go up. The three districts with lowest cps were: Logan (5,840 students) at $181 cps; South Sanpete (2,878 students) at $198 cps; and Juab (1,796 students) at $207 cps. Alpine (45,208 students) is next at $237 cps.[12] In the 2000 legislative audit on class size reduction monies, the smaller districts were better able to account for specific funding than big districts because the big district budgets were so complicated.

Nor have they necessarily provided better education. In her review of 100 research projects, Kathleen Cotton observes, "The states with the largest schools and school districts have the worst achievement, affective, and social outcomes."[13] According to Florence Webb, researchers have fallen into two camps on the question of district size and student achievement: those who see no advantage for big districts and those who find "that achievement drops as enrollment levels rise." She states that this is even more evident in lower socioeconomic populations: "there was a strong, consistent negative correlation between district size and student achievement in [low-income] populations."[14] Herbert Walberg goes even farther to show a direct, negative relationship of the states with large district size and test results.[15] Jewell states point-blank that

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[9] *Ibid.*, 130.

[10] Antonucci, "Mission Creep."

[11] K. McGuire, "School Size: The continuing controversy," *Education and Urban Society* (2: 21, February) 164-174.

[12] Costs were compiled by taking the total reported administrative costs in each district for 1999 and dividing by the number of students in each district.

[13] Kathleen Cotton, "School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance," *Close-Up* (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory: #20).

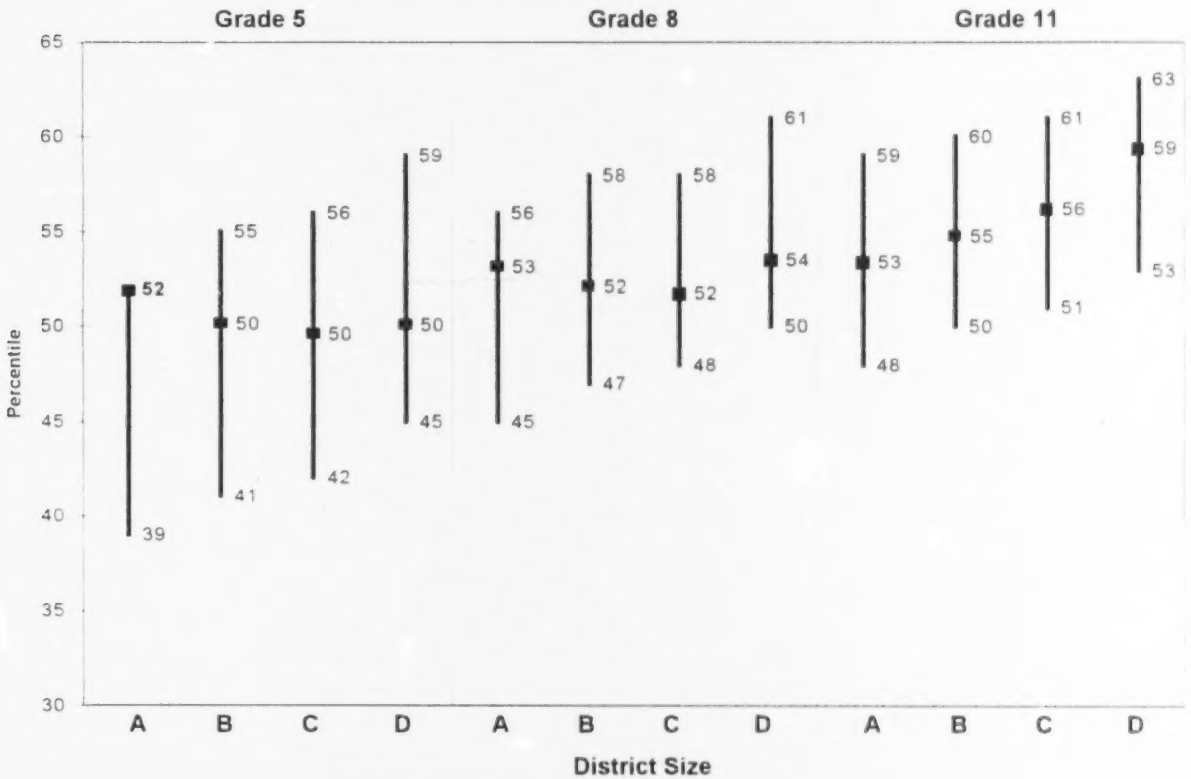
[14] Webb, "A District of a Certain Size," 134-5.

[15] Herbert J. Walberg, "On Local Control: Is Bigger Better?" *University of Chicago* (No. 59: Nov. 22, 1993) 16.

"Students in states with smaller districts and smaller schools have higher SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) and ACT scores."[16]

Utah does not seem to be an exception to national trends. On a surface examination, Utah school districts' 1997-2000 Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) scores are nearly identical no matter what size the school. Since most small districts are poorer than large districts, however, the results look quite different when achievement is adjusted for socioeconomic conditions (see chart 1 below).

Chart 1. Average District SAT Scores by District Size.



District Size	Letters indicate different district sizes by number of students **A**=1,200 or less, **B**=1,200-6,000, **C**=6,000-15,000, **D**=15,000 or more
▬	"Expected range": numbers show average minimum and average maximum expected scores for all schools in all districts of the specified size
■	Schools' actual scores averaged for all schools in all districts of specified size

Source: Test scores reported in the *Utah Statewide Stanford Achievement Test Results* (Utah State Office of Education, 2001)

[16] Jewell, "School and School District Size Relationships," 149.

"Expected range" refers to the expected test score range based on the socioeconomic makeup of the student population, specifically, the higher the level of poverty among students, the lower the expected scores. The school assesses its level of poverty based on the number of students who receive federally sponsored free lunches; this measure relied upon nationwide. In test scores for both grade 5 and grade 8 shown above, smaller districts seem to perform consistently better within their expected ranges.

- The smallest districts (1,200 students or fewer) scored highest within their expected range, with actual scores falling at 99 percent of the expected range in grade 5 and 74 percent in grade 8.
- Medium-small districts (1,200-6,000 students) scored next highest, 65 percent in grade 5 and 47 percent in grade 8.
- Medium-large (6,000-15,000 students) score next, 54 percent of expected range in grade 5 and 37 percent in grade 8.
- The largest districts (15,000 students or more) scored lowest in their expected range, 36 percent in grade 5 and 32 percent in grade 8.

The data on high school scores do not follow the same trend as elementary and middle schools. Grade 11 scores fall consistently within socioeconomic expectations, which increase with district size. Perhaps large districts and schools serve high school students as well as small districts and schools. Another possibility is that the lower-scoring students in bigger districts drop out. Large schools, most often located in large districts, have higher dropout rates than small schools.[17] If the struggling students who score lowest have already left the school by grade 11, the school's average score will rise, but it will not accurately reflect how well the school serves its student population.

These data leave many questions unanswered, including the reason why high-school students seem to do well in large districts and schools. They do not account for class size. However, in light of national data that shows large districts perform more poorly than small districts on standardized tests, the data suggest that Utah follows this trend.

Big Districts = Big Schools

School size is very closely tied to district size. What research has demonstrated regarding district size, it has even more clearly demonstrated regarding school size. Kathleen Cotton and Karen Irmsher, in separate reviews of more than 100 research projects regarding school and district size, show conclusively that bigger is not better once schools increase beyond a certain size. Irmsher writes, "Michael Klonsky (1995), and Mary Anne Raywid (1995), and others report that large school size hurts attendance and dampens enthusiasm for involvement in school activities. Large schools have lower grade averages and standardized-test scores coupled with higher dropout rates and more problems with violence, security, and drug abuse."[18] She says that

[17] Philip Langdon, "Students do better in small schools so why have we been making schools bigger?" *The American Enterprise* (January 2000) 25.

[18] Karen Irmsher, "School Size," *ERIC Digest* (113 July 1997). On the Web at http://www.library.uluc.edu/schoolreform/sconsol.htm

higher dropout rates and more problems with violence, security, and drug abuse."[18] She says that with smaller schools, "Security improves and violence decreases, as does student alcohol and drug abuse." Cotton quotes Jean Stockard and Maralee Mayberry (1992), "Behavior problems are so much greater in larger schools that any possible virtue of larger size is canceled out be the difficulties of maintaining an orderly learning environment."[19]

Larger schools are not necessarily less expensive either. McGuire writes, "Generally, there is agreement that unit costs are higher in the smallest and largest schools. Various studies characterize per-pupil school costs as having a U-shaped average cost curve, where costs are high in both the smallest and largest schools."[20] While smaller schools are slightly more expensive per *student*, the cost per *graduate* is less in smaller schools because smaller schools have fewer dropouts.[21] Based on cost per graduate, smaller schools are a better deal and since successful graduates are the overall goal of education, cost per graduate is the measure we should use.

District size tends to dictate school size. Jewell says that large schools are concentrated in large districts. He shows that Utah is sixth in average district size and also sixth in average size of school.[22] This connection makes sense when one considers how school buildings are funded. Buildings are funded through voter approved bonds. When a district is large, administrators find it hard to get positive votes for bonding in areas that do not need the new school. These areas are reluctant to increase their taxes because they don't see the need and won't feel the benefit. Over time some bonds don't pass, forcing administrators to build fewer schools. Those that are built must then be made bigger. To gain voter approval in non-growth areas, administrators then offer additions to existing buildings making them bigger as well. Therefore in big districts both old and new buildings end up bigger.

There may be other reasons that promote larger schools. Patrons needing another school may want everything that was built or installed in the last school built. The booster club may want more enhanced sports facilities, for instance, making it politically necessary to add something to the bond for older schools to buy voter approval in those areas. This may make the bond bigger than desired and so instead of building two smaller schools that are needed, administrators compromise and build one larger one with all the extras.

Utah's big districts have public perceptions that the other side of the district is getting more benefit than their side. Davis's and Alpine's north and south sides and Granite's and Jordan's east and west sides have fought each other for years over which direction the tax dollars are flowing. Smaller districts may be more likely to pass bonds because the community as a whole would see the need and feel the benefit. They would not have to fight another community for political power and tax dollars. They would not have to take from another area for their own

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[18] Karen Irmsher, "School Size," *ERIC Digest* (113 July 1997). On the Web at: http://www.library.uluc.edu/schoolreform/sconsol.htm

[19] Cotton, "School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance."

[20] K. McGuire, "School Size: The continuing controversy," *Education and Urban Society* (21: 2, February) 164-74.

[21] Langdon, "Students do better in small schools," 25.

[22] Jewell, "School and School District Size Relationships," 143-5.

Big Solutions, Big Mistakes?

Some districts elsewhere in the United States have tried to solve big school problems with the "school within a school" approach. These districts take one large school building and school population and divide it into several small "schools," each administered separately, with separate faculties and classroom spaces, but all housed in the same building. This approach attempts to gain the recognized benefits of smaller size without having to build new schools, and has resulted in some mixed improvement. In 1996 Craig Howley reported,

> If size is a structural phenomenon, however, caution is warranted in approaching the simulation of small size through such mechanisms as "schools-within-schools" and "house plans" (Meier, 1995; Oxley, 1994; Raywid, 1996). In general, despite substantial popularity, research on the effectiveness of simulating small size as a way to restructure is very limited (Raywid, 1996).[23]

The school within a school approach seems like a good idea, but those districts that have employed it so far have only made superficial administrative changes: they've reshuffled the deck, but they're still playing the same game. "The major challenge to schools within schools," writes Mary Ann Raywid, "has been obtaining sufficient separateness and autonomy to permit staff members to generate a distinctive environment and to carry out their own vision of schooling."[24] In other words, they have failed to address the issue of control.

Some big districts have likewise tried to gain the advantages of smaller neighborhood districts. The Los Angeles School District created subdistricts two years ago; some Utah districts use cluster and cone councils; other districts attempt to push more control to local school levels. These attempts have met with limited success, as Walberg notes.

> Modern means of decentralizing funding and governance within multi-layered educational organizations—state accountability schemes, school-site management, New York City's community boards, and Chicago's local school councils—have yet to prove their value. Nor have "home rooms" and "schools within schools" shown that they can recapture the advantages of small schools.[25]

As I have argued, the idea of decentralizing and giving the local community control is key to improving education, and yet attempts to decentralize aren't working. Why? The answer, in short, is money. It is very difficult to really turn over control and responsibility to these groups because they are not the legally recognized taxing entity. They cannot raise revenues or allocate them, which leaves them, as before, mere arms of the larger district.

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[23] Craig Howley, "Ongoing Dilemmas of School Size: A Short Story" ERIC Digest, December 1996.

[24] Mary Ann Raywid, "Family choice arrangements in public schools: A review of the literature," *Review of Educational Research* (55:4, 1985) 455.

[25] Walberg, "On Local Control: Is Bigger Better?" 20.

Big Consequences

Big districts and schools, which promised better education for less money, have not delivered on their promise, and may in fact provide worse education for more money. Nevertheless, Utah has some of the largest districts in the nation, and according to the *1999 Fall Enrollment Report* from USOE, 85 percent of Utah's high school students attend schools that research shows are too big. Utah's smaller districts seem to perform better than their larger counterparts, not because teachers and principals in big districts don't care or don't try, but because the bureaucracy, which a large district must have for control, ties their hands.

School administrators cannot afford to ignore this problem, not only because providing quality education is their chief responsibility, but because if they don't deal with the problem, the public will find ways to deal with it for them. Bigness alienates citizens toward our educational institutions, depleting local support. Instead citizens will take their complaints to the state, resulting in increased state controls and the diversion of funding from basic instruction into accountability schemes that attempt to force quality (although these attempts are destined to fail and induce further dissatisfaction).

Back in 1989, Walberg predicted six public reactions to big districts and schools:

- declarations of educational bankruptcy and state appointment of "receiverships" of new boards and central staff;
- breaking up large-city districts into free-standing smaller units;
- suits by parents for failing to employ state-of-the-art educational practices;
- litigation by graduates for fraudulent services and diplomas;
- magnet schools and choice plans within and outside districts and the public sector; and
- vouchers and tax rebates for private or public tuition.

He further wrote, "These schemes are motivated by the desperation of some legislators, business people, citizens, and parents who wish to employ the courts or market-like competition to improve the efficiency of schools, particularly those in large districts, that seem unable to respond constructively to their clients and society."[26]

All of these results have come to pass in this country, and some of them in Utah. Only one has any chance of really improving public education: breaking up our large districts. Much can be said for the success of magnet and charter schools, and vouchers and tuition tax-credits, but in the end these reforms only imitate for some students what could be accomplished for all students with smaller schools in smaller districts.

Utah's still-booming population will mean ever-bigger schools and districts. The state's test scores have long ago leveled out and may be starting to decline. The problem of super-sized districts and schools is not going away.

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[26] Herbert J. Walberg, "District Size and Student Learning," *Education and Urban Society* (1989) 128.

Setting a limit on the size for both districts and schools, and creating an orderly way to set up these new districts, will achieve better academics and a more efficient use of tax dollars over the long term. It will encourage more participation by both students and citizens. Smaller districts and schools bring the problems and opportunities back to the local level. This freedom will spur innovation, flexibility, and commitment by both parents and teachers. Only then will true accountability, educational quality, and efficiency be within our reach.

David N. Cox is a Utah public school teacher and a member of the Utah State House of Representatives. He has created the Web site www.smallschools.org to help educate people about the benefits of small schools.

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